New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

Volume IX, Number 20 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 25, 1948

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

NEW YORK TIMES — NEW YORK MIRROR

NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK STAR — NEW YORK POST

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"Life with Mother"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 21, 1948

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Happy Return of THE DAYS

THE Day family has taken over the stage of the Empire Theater again in a happy sequel to the enchanting and record-breaking "Life With Father." This time it is "Life With Mother" which Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have woven together out of Clarence Day's memorable memoirs. The flighty and stubborn Vinnie deserved a special tribute. Played with antic charm by Dorothy Stickney, who created the original role, she is a character of substance and quiet humor as she copes with her explosive husband, their red-headed sons and various invaders of a tumultuous household in the late 1880's. The comedy is neither as hilarious nor as nostalgic as its eminent predecessor, but it is a pleasant elongation of a drama which became very much a part of American life.

* * *

Father still dominates the doings, for all the change in title. In the hands of Lindsay, who seems comfortable again in a wig, carrot-colored mustache and a Prince Albert, the irascible and somewhat eccentric patriarch sustains an undercurrent of scattered laughter, particularly when he is back in the Madison Avenue town house in the third act. The preceding stanzas find the Days summering in Harrison, where the authors have involved them in minor skirmishes about an engagement ring, a former fiancee of the elder Day, a sale of stock to Cousin Cora and her hayseed husband and a puppy love of young Clarence. The authors have not been particularly imaginative in their plotting, but they have had the craftsmanship to echo much of "Life With Father" and contrive a steady crescendo for their climax.

* * *

Miss Stickney and Lindsay have not altered their portrayals perceptibly in a piece which takes place a couple of years after the original. She has her way as often as before in "Life With Mother," getting the betrothal ring which had been denied her for twenty-two years, satisfying Cora by buying her depreciated stock certificates, and running her home with casual correctness. The actress has no such dramatic interludes as she had some eight years ago, but she is a prototype of the New York wife and mother of the last century. Lindsay roars at anything that disturbs his peculiar pattern of existence and manages to get some agreeable sentiment into several scenes.

* * *

Of great assistance in pulling off a sequel which suffers from a common complaint of such enterprises are Ruth Hammond and Robert Emhardt as the visiting cousins from Ohio, who drive father to the point of exasperation, and Gladys Huribut, who is fat and funny as the lady who almost married Clarence sr. before he met Vinnie. John Drew Devereaux, David Frank, Robert Wade and Robert Antoine are good as the Day boys and the other members of the company keep a period piece diverting. Donald Oenslager has designed a new setting for the summer home, while Stewart Chaney's original background frames the Madison Avenue episodes. The Guthrie McClintic staging wisely does not make too much of little. "Life With Mother" is no "Life With Father," but it is a nice and amusing existence.

'LIFE WITH MOTHER.'

LIFE WITH MOTHER, a play in three acts, by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, based on the stories of Clarence Day. Produced by Oscar Serlin; staged by Guthrie McClintic; first and second act setting and costumes by Donald Oenslager; third act setting by Stewart Chaney. At the Empire Theatre.

Father	Howard Lindsay
Whitney	David Frank
Harlan	Robert Wade
John	Robert Antoine
Margaret	Dorothy Bernard
Clarence	John Drew Devereaux
Michael	Michael Smith
Vinnie	Dorothy Stickney
Bridget	Mary Diveny
Hazel Willoughby	Jo Anne Paul
Bessie Fuller Logan	Gladys Huribut
Mrs. Willoughby	Amy Douglass
Clyde Miller	Robert Emhardt
Cousin Cora	Ruth Hammond
Kathleen	Margaretta Mortimer
Dr. Humphreys	A. H. Van Buren

SYNOPSIS: Time, mid-afternoon. The last day of August in the 1880s. Act I. Scene 1, the living room of the Day country home at Harrison, N. Y. Act II. Scene 1. The same, Saturday afternoon. Scene 2. The same. Just before twilight. Act III. Scene 1. The morning room of the Day house on Madison Avenue in New York City. A few days later. Scene 2. The same. Late that afternoon.

New York Post

OCTOBER 21, 1948

Father's New Exploits Make Delightful Play

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Who started the idiotic myth that there is danger in sequels? Last night at the Empire the ridiculous legend was beautifully blown to pieces when "Life With Mother," which, it is no secret is the long-awaited sequel to the classic "Life With Father," was revealed to an eager audience and proved to be every bit as delightful as its predecessor. It is almost enough to say that Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have done it again, and that their new play, glowingly acted by Dorothy Stickney, Mr. Lindsay and their admirable colleagues, is so wonderfully warm and winning that the theatre once more becomes a joy.

Again the chief miracle wrought by the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse in bringing to the stage the domestic misadventures of Clarence Day and his embattled family in the New York of the 1880's lies in their ability to write a completely loveable comedy about their particular hero. Once more Father is a petty tyrant of apparently the most unspeakable kind, pig-headed, stingy, cantankerous and never so happy as when bullying the servants. Yet somehow, by the seemingly simple process of seeing to it that he never wins anything more than a minor skirmish, they have made him not only bearable but oddly endearing.

Baffled Tyrant

Of course, the secret of Father's success as a comic hero, who arouses affection as well as laughter, is not as simple as that. It comes from the deep, humorous regard that the authors have for the old fellow. They see through him, but they also like him, and they admire him for the fashion in which he continues to insist on having his way, even though he always loses. His is a constant battle against personal rout and he always comes back for another licking. He is, of all things, a wistful tyrant, and he is played with such knowing devotion by Mr. Lindsay that he becomes a baffled hero of American domestic folklore.

Mother, of course, is a folklore heroine, with her foolishness and her wisdom, her gentleness and her indomitable will for victory. As Father never wins a battle, she never loses one, for her combination of sweetness and ruthlessness is unconquerable. She is so much tougher than her husband because her sweetness is a deadly weapon. Indeed, she might be a pretty terrifying figure if she weren't played so enchantingly. There is no more beguiling actress on the American stage than Miss Stickney, and her portrayal of the scatterbrained lady who really runs the Day family is a masterpiece of deftness, satire, humor and loveliness.

As "Life With Father" was a series of comic episodes tied together by a thin thread of plot about Mother's determination to get Father baptized, "Life With Mother" is a series of episodes given unity by Mother's equally successful determination to make Father give her a long-delayed engagement ring. Where the new play is, if anything, superior to its predecessor is in its introduction of two new characters of great comic value: a kittenish ex-sweetheart of Father's youthful days and the know-it-all husband of Cousin Cora, who is certain he isn't going to let city slickers put anything over on him.

There are so many episodes which deserve applause that I will merely suggest one about the youngest son's efforts to recite a poem while his father and Cousin Cora's husband are having a fight. It is so hilariously done by a boy actor named Robert Wade that I am inclined to put the infant performer second to the stars in the delight of his playing. There is also a fine performance by Robert Emhardt as the aforementioned husband of Cousin Cora, and Gladys Hurlbut is excellent as the ex-flame, but the truth is that everybody is so good that it is a shame to omit mentioning any of them. The staging by Guthrie McClintic is splendidly inventive, the sets and costumes are perfect, and everything is in wonderful shape.

"BEST PLAYS OF 1947-1948"

Selection of the ten best in the now published 1947-1948 volume of "The Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1947-1948", edited by John Chapman, is:

"A Streetcar Named Desire"	"The Winslow Boy"
"Command Decision"	"Eastward in Eden"
"Mister Roberts"	*"Skipper Next to God"
"The Heiress"	"An Inspector Calls"
"Allegro"	"Me and Molly"

**An Experimental Theatre production not reviewed in N. Y. Theatre Critics' Reviews*

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 21, 1948

In 'Life With Mother' the Family Are as Human and Funny as Ever

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Mrs. Chapman and I dropped in to see the Clarence Days last evening at their country place in Harrison, N. Y. We hadn't seen them for quite a time and had been wondering how they were getting on. We know a lot of our friends have been wondering, too. They should be glad to learn, as we were, that the Days are just fine. They still are human beings.

Clare hasn't changed a bit. He is a little older than he was, but he gets just as mad as ever. You have to know Clare pretty well to like him—but most of his friends have known him a long time and they know those fits he gets don't mean anything, really. He's a nice fellow, once you get used to him.

Vinnie? She's just the same. Prettier, maybe, and still sweet. I don't know just how she managed it, but Clare has bought her some lovely new dresses. My wife says they are lovely. But then, you know Vinnie as well as we do. Once in a while she may act a little stupid, but she isn't. She gets what she wants. When we were there she got an engagement ring out of Clare that he had been owing her for more than 22 years.

A Little Crazy.

If they didn't have so much character I guess the Days would be counted a little crazy by some people. The boys aren't so bad, of course, except that young Harlan will start reciting poetry at the drop of a hat and keep on reciting until he gets to the end of the poem. Clarence Jr. is a sophomore at Yale now and for a while he thought he was engaged to a girl. That is why his mother wanted to get the engagement ring, so she could give it to him to give to his girl. John is just starting as a freshman at Yale. I suppose before long he will be getting engaged, too.

The country place they have is really nice, with a big, airy living room and plenty of places for flowers. They have a horse and Clare can go riding before dinner. They have a little trouble with Michael, the coachman, because he won't always stay sober, but Margaret, their old maid, is still with them and she is a comfort.

One thing you have to say about the Days—there is never a dull moment around their place. Clare is always raising a fuss, of course, but when we were there other things happened, too. A funny woman with a funny bustle came calling, named Bessie Fuller Logan, and she was the one Clare was engaged to before he married Vinnie. That's why she had the engagement ring and Vinnie didn't.

Vinnie Gets the Ring.

And a Cousin Cora and her husband, Clyde, dropped in from Ohio. I thought Clyde was amusing in a crude sort of way, but Clare couldn't stand him. Ordered him out of the house. It was embarrassing for a while, but finally everything was smoothed out.

Later on we saw the Days at their old place in town, on Madison Avenue. It's just the same. They still have the same breakfast but there is a different serving maid. They can't keep anybody very long, except Margaret. When Clare finally got that ring away from Bessie Fuller he gave it to Vinnie here in town. I don't know why she had to make such a fuss about it, and neither does he. It isn't such a big ring, but for some reason it was more important to her than the diamond necklace he gave her on their 22d anniversary. She's a little silly, some times.

First chance you get you should call on them. They are at the Empire Theatre. The sign outside says "Life with Mother." That's a laugh.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 21, 1948

Days a Little Older In 'Life With Mother'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The greatest compliment anyone can pay everyone connected with "Life With Mother" is to say it gives you the same satisfaction as would paying a good long, talky call on the delightful Day family.

They have been out of town for over a year, which is far too long, and there is a great deal to catch up with. Of course you will be anxious to know if they have changed, and the good news is that they are still their enchanting selves.

Clarence and John went to Yale this fall, Whitney broke his arm last summer but went off to boarding school, and Harlan has become a walking anthology of well known poems.

Vinnie is prettier than ever and seems to grow younger. She is still bewitching with her dainty guile, innocent and wise, temperamental and naive. And she remains one of the most winningly illogical women of all time.

Father Is Father.

As for Clare, how could he ever change? Mighty few men could stay so pompous and be lovable, but Father does. You remember how he stalks about, poking his stomach out and belaying everybody in sight with that stentorian voice. It isn't really that Clare wants his own way about anything. He just enjoys the appearance of making up everybody's mind.

It was so typical of him to call the furniture store and order an icebox full of ice when the old one didn't work. And so like Vinnie to say her only problem about wine that should be served at room temperature was to find what temperature the room ought to be.

They are wonderful together, and Vinnie put it just right when she said she knew how Clare felt about her, but she wanted to be sure he knew.

Old Flame a Fire Hazard.

During the summer they had a real rift, for them, when an old girl friend of Father's turned up still wearing the engagement ring he gave her over 22 years ago before he and Mother were married.

It seems he never had given Vinnie one, and even after all that time it was a matter of pride with her that she still wanted a solitaire to go with her gold band. Father said engagement rings were a poor investment, and if Bessie had returned the ring in the first place it would have been Mother's. Of course after that, nothing would suit Mother but that particular ring.

How she got it is quite a story, and one they will have to tell you themselves. Mother ended up with a diamond necklace, too, and some stock of variable value. But the Days can explain when you see them just what happened, more charmingly than anyone else could.

In the Best Hands.

A great many people have impersonated Mother and Father Day, but no one knows more about them than Dorothy Stickney and Howard Lindsay. In her quaint and lovely gowns of the 80s, Miss Stickney graces these new adventures with the daintiness of a hummingbird. In the feminine vernacular of her domestic world she has the wiles of an international spy, and she plies them with dewy sorcery.

As that amiable martinet of a Father, Howard Lindsay is bluff and elegant, a grand scale poseur whose domineering manner can be melted but never crossed. He literally exudes a tradition of what the head of a household should be, yet with all his superficial bullying, makes Father tender and stalwart, deserving of the family idolatry he demands.

Familiar Faces.

Gladys Hurlbut lavishes a keen sense of the witless on the troublesome Bessie, and Ruth Hammond is back at what seems a lifelong career as giddy Cousin Cora, whom she played through the whole run of "Life With Father."

So are Dorothy Bernard as the understanding Margaret, and A. H. Van Buren in his old role of the family doctor. John Drew Devereux is again the Clarence he originated, now old enough to be a college junior and get engaged.

Robert Emhardt is a particularly welcome addition to the company as Cousin Cora's new husband, who dares to know more than Father about a couple of things.

Outhrie McClintick has directed "Life With Mother" with all the touching wit and nostalgic flavor that are so characteristic of this famous family. To the familiar town house drawing room of Stewart Chaney's, Donald Oenslager has added a fresh and handsome country home and some mouth watering gowns for Mother.

Personally we don't like the idea of the Days going away again even as far as Harrison for the holidays. As Father would say, "Oh, Ga-a-ahd! It's good to have them back in town again!"

The Sun

OCTOBER 21, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Triumph at the Empire.

The New York theater rose to brilliance last night as "Life With Mother" took over the stage of the Empire. Perhaps there need be no concern for the drama as long as Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse are writing the plays and Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney are acting in them. They all had a triumphant evening.

"Life With Mother" is a comedy of undiminishing delight. A warm, chuckling, family-life play, superbly directed by Guthrie McClintic, and one that brings the Day household back to the local stage—the braying and unbridled Father Day, the patient and managing Vinnie, the red-topped Day boys, the unwanted callers and the jumpy and uneasy servants. Old, old friends are with us again and the walls of the Day mansion are shaking once more as Father stomps about the morning room roaring "Oh, Gahd!"

It's a thinnish story that is told in "Life With Mother," told in two acts in the country home at Harrison, N. Y. and in a third in the house on Madison avenue. Just the story of Father's struggle to recover an engagement ring given by him in his youthful and more improvident years to a fiancee, who has become a buxom and fluttery widow, with a lively capacity for torture.

"Life With Mother," as with its historic predecessor, is a comedy full of those minor family crises, a comedy of fresh and beguiling touches, delightful little twists, sagacious and unforgettable bits in writing and in the playing and in the direction. There is the enormously amusing scene when Father is wrangling with the family doctor about a small bill which had been sent along by a monstrous intruder who called himself a specialist. There are the tirades at the wall telephone, which was forever ringing in those summers of the 1880s. There is the wonderful interlude when little Harlan, youngest of the Days, ever given to recitations, goes on resolutely speaking his piece to the dire end, and as his adult audience, to whom he was addressing himself, gets into a violent row over a sharp drop in Chesapeake & Ohio stock.

"Life With Mother," admirably produced by Oscar Serlin, is the kind of project that finds the professional theater soaring beyond the reach of competitive mediums. It's a play that has the services of two distinguished scenic designers, Donald Oenslager and Stewart Chaney, and an able cast. Dorothy Stickney, after a pardonable and seemingly heartbreaking (for the mere instant) slip in the first act, goes on to give a wistful and thoroughly delightful performance as the all-wise Vinnie, who eventualy gets her engagement ring after being married twenty-two years. Howard Lindsay again makes the thundering Father Day one of the most engaging characters the American theater has ever known. Robert Emhardt is vastly amusing as a brassy upstart from the corn belt, the man in the hay, grain and feed business, to whom Cousin Cora is now married, and who dares to talk back to Father.

Ruth Hammond, after all those years in "Life With Father," returns as a refreshing Cora. Gladys Hurlbut is extraordinarily good as the gushing and giggling widow in exultant possession of the ring. There are first-rate performances from Robert Wade as Harlan, Michael Smith as the man about the place, Dorothy Bernard as the faithful Margaret, John Drew Devereaux as Clarence. And a brief welcome glimpse of A. H. Van Buren as the growling family doctor.

Everybody will be asking if "Life With Mother" is as good as "Life With Father." I suppose it is, quite definitely. Not just a sequel, it's a completely new play, and one rich in characterization and human touches. But go see for yourself. You will probably have seven years in which to do it.

Journal American

OCTOBER 21, 1948

The Good, Old Days Are Back on B'way!

By ROBERT GARLAND

The good old Days are here again. And all's right with the world of make-believe. Apart from one change of scene and one other change of title, home life at Broadway and 40th st. is as it was when, on an eventful evening in November, 1939, "Life With Father" took possession of the Empire Theatre.

Less roundaboutly, I herewith will report that "Life With Mother," a new Clarence Day chronicle—the second in a series by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse—has arrived on schedule. Mr. Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney are in the leading roles. And every other Day is there, including Cousin Cora.

Clyde Miller, Cousin Cora's husband, is the only newfound member of the family. And he's no blood relation to Clare and Vinnie, to John, Whitney, Harlan and Clarence Jr. But he, as the blustering bridegroom, is an important factor in the unfolding of the latest Day-starred comedy.

From Ohio, where Millers are men and Days are next to nothing, Clyde stands up to Father more aggressively than Mother ever did. Aided—abetted, even—by Bessie Fuller Logan, a still burning flame of the elder Clarence's, they keep the story moving when Clare and Vinnie are offstage...

Which, I'm pleased to add, is infrequently!

• • •

True to Formula

Not unadvisedly, "Life With Mother" follows the tried-and-found-effective formula of "Life With Father"! Although the time would seem to be after Father's humiliating bout with baptism, Mother remains sweetly determined to make Father do something he doesn't want to do. And do it the funny way!

Now it's the engagement ring Mother has not yet been given. Where, in the elder comedy, Father had never had baptismal water on his forehead, here, in the younger one, Mother has never had a hand of promise on her finger. But Bessie Fuller Logan has! And by Father, whose proposal she once accepted.

Of course, Mother Vinnie gets her engagement ring. But not until the Days have moved from their country house at Harrison, where you meet them in "Life With Mother," to their town house in New York, where you left them—and met them, too—in "Life With Father." They seem happier in the city.

As, last night, the concluding curtain rose and fell, the entire family re-enacted that enchanting daguerreotyped tableau which brings out the homelikeness of the narrative, the quaintness of the costumes and the nostalgia of the period. Again, the female of the Days had been smarter than the male...

The ardent audience and I adored it!

• • •

Stickney Flawless

Of the "Life With Father" cast, six of the original members remain. These, as they come on, are Howard Lindsay, whose Father has broadened with the years, Dorothy Bernard, whose Margaret is comfortably the same, John Drew Devereaux, whose Clarence Jr. is even more engaging than before, and Dorothy Stickney—

Well, it's Dorothy Stickney who, as Mother, gives me pause. For her sweetly determined Vinnie has waxed warmer through the years while Mr. Lindsay's Clare has been broadening. Now, in the new Day chronicle at the Empire, the lovely little lady who always gets her way is flawless in her looks and underplaying.

Ruth Hammond, as Cousin Cora, bride, is little changed from Cousin Cora, spinster. When Mr. Lindsay and Miss Stickney are tired of pretending to be Father and Mother Day, the co-authors of last evening's comedy should compose a "Life With Cousin Cora" for Miss Hammond's own. A. H. Van Buren's Dr. Humphreys remains in character.

So goes this second instalment of the saga of the house of Clarence Day. Under Guthrie McClintic, the Bretaigne Windust design is consistently maintained. Except, perhaps, for such occasional over-accentuation as is demanded. The cool country house is Donald Oenslager's. The warm town house is Stewart Chaney's...

Yes, the good old Days are here again. And welcome!

The New York Times

OCTOBER 21, 1948

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since Father and Mother Day are lovable people, it is wonderful to have them back. Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, who wrote the fabulous "Life With Father," have followed it with "Life With Mother," which they installed in the Empire last evening. Although the incidents and some of the characters are new, it seems like old times, for Dorothy Stickney and Mr. Lindsay are back in the parts they created nine years ago out of Clarence Day's humorous yet affectionate sketches. "Ghad!" Father Day roars at the proper intervals. "Why, what's the matter, Clare?" Mother Day anxiously inquires, neither surprised nor alarmed. That is all most of us needed last evening to feel very happy, indeed.

* * *

Purely for professional reasons, it must be pointed out that "Life With Mother" ranks somewhere below "Life With Father" as a play. It is more laboriously contrived. It is thinner, and there are moments when it hardly hangs together as a drama. That concludes this morning's exercise in criticism. For the important thing is that the authors have not tampered with the central characters, who have become American institutions, and have preserved the marvelous unity of the Day family, which stands shoulder to shoulder against the outside world.

"Life With Mother" looks in on this ideal family on the twenty-second wedding anniversary of the parents. What holds the narrative together is Mother's tardy crusade for the engagement ring that Father had coolly neglected to give her before he rushed her to the altar. By accident she discovers that he had given an engagement ring to a girl to whom he had been betrothed previously, and, worse than that, the girl—now a silly woman of middle age—is still impudently wearing it. "Life With Mother" manages to put that detail right, as "Life With Father" managed to get Father baptized amid proper bellows of profanity nine years ago.

* * *

But the plot is a detail amid the sentimental humors of a fascinating family life. Father is choleric and domineering, pompously intolerant of anything outside his own family—at once the most unsympathetic and loyal parent in stage history. Mother is the most incompetent and bird-brained of women, yet obviously an able and devoted wife and parent. From the point of view of logic, it is a mystery how this family hangs together. But the grand joke of the Day saga is that Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse manage to present it as thoroughly normal, reasonable and inevitable—a humorous idealization of American family life, set just far enough back in history to be entirely credible. Everyone sees in the stormy daily life of the Days things that seem to have come out of his own experience. Obviously, family life is hopeless, but obviously it works.

The Lord knows there are plenty of broad strokes in the performance. "Life With Father" had a suggestion of vaudeville; "Life With Mother" has taken the hint and moved over into the vaudeville tempo and style. Mind you, this column is offering no objections. For Guthrie McClintic's direction is sturdy, artful and lucid, and the performance has relish, warmth and humor. From the original company several well-loved actors remain—Dorothy Bernard as the sweet-tempered housekeeper, Ruth Hammond as Cousin Cora, A. H. Van Buren as the hirsute physician, and John Drew Devereaux as the junior Day, now a junior also at Yale.

* * *

The new cast members have been chosen with a real fondness for the Day tribe. In the well-written part of a Western braggart—the provincial counterpart of Father Day—Robert Emhardt is vastly enjoyable. His fatuous whine is incomparably maddening and entertaining. Gladys Hurlbut as the simpering, bridling old flame, Michael Smith as the bibulous coachman and Amy Douglass as a treacherous neighbor, give excellent performances. Nearly everyone this winter is going to fall in love with little Robert Wade, who acts the youngest Day with humorous gentility and provides the most hilarious scene of the play by reciting "An Incident in the French Camp" with gestures.

* * *

But life with the Days is richest when it is life with Mr. Lindsay and Miss Stickney, who understand these people so thoroughly and respect them so highly. Mr. Lindsay's arrogance, rage, stuffy dignity, wry grimaces of civility, his clumsy and astonished proffers of love and devotion are happily transparent and immortally funny. As Mother, Miss Stickney is the perfect contrast—gentle, wavering, illogical, easily rattled, yet full of grace and affection.

To house the Days in country splendor, Donald Oenslager has designed an amusingly rococo drawing-room, appallingly stuffed with knick-knacks. The third act of "Life With Mother" returns to Stewart Chaney's city-house set from "Life With Father," and seems very much at home there. Probably that is how we all felt last evening. The Days are wonderful people, and it is thoroughly delightful to be at home with them again.

NEW YORK STAR

OCTOBER 22, 1948

By John Lardner

Life With Mom and Pop (Chap. II) . . .

Up till Wednesday night, when *Life with Mother* went in at left halfback for *Life with Father* at the Empire, the Clarence Day family was new to your correspondent—I mean the stage version of the Clarence Day family, as conceived by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse and dedicated to the Department of Internal Revenue.

This is no time for my own memoirs, which can be obtained in the paper-back edition at any taxidermist's shop by students of the macabre, but I may as well confess right now that I never saw *Life with Father*. By the time I had a chance to see it, it had already run more than four years, and I am opposed to anything that runs more than four years on the ground that it might exert a bad influence on my old friend T. E. Dewey, who has an imitative turn of mind.

* * *

Certain inferences, however, may safely be drawn from *Life with Mother* by myself and the 14 other people who missed *Father*. For one thing, I think all 15 of us are apt to enjoy the new play more for not having seen its predecessor. Coming at us for the first time, the characters of *Life with Mother* and their comic ways and tricks of speech must seem fresher and funnier than they will to those weary sophisticates who caught *Father* back in the third or fourth Roosevelt administration. Taken separately, without previous experience, *Mother* is a droll, sunny, enjoyable little play.

Nonetheless, the stigmata of the serial, of "radio-type" entertainment, are there for even the newcomer to see very plainly. There are sound touches of human nature in *Life with Mother*, and a fair, clear view of the comfortable middle-class life of the 1880's, as presumably there were in *Life with Father*. But I suspect they are the same old touches. I suspect that Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse are now mining the theme, as the conservationists say, rather than cultivating it.

Possibly there is nothing wrong with this approach, as regards entertainment. Economically, in fact, it's a darb. It keeps a lot of actors at work and prevents the boxoffice staff at the Empire from dropping off to sleep and bumping its head against the grillework. Also, once you get a serial like this one running under a full head of steam, the possibilities are endless, or thereabouts: *Life with Father, Life with Mother, Life on a Houseboat, Life at the Bottom of the Mississippi, Life on Wholewheat*, and finally *Life with Charles of the Ritz*, when all the Days of the story can have their hair changed from red to black and start a new cycle.

The main trouble with a serial, as with a comic strip or the Jack Benny program, is that sooner or later—and *Life with Mother* is merely installment 2—the characters turn on themselves and become burlesques instead of characters. Thus, when Mother, or Vinnie Day says "Damn!" in the third act, she is depending on the studio audience's knowledge of past form and milking the laugh.

* * *

There is no need to concern yourself with the plot of *Life with Mother*; for that matter, I wish that Mr. Lindsay and Crouse had not concerned themselves so much with it either. An engagement ring that Mother never got, an old sweetheart of Father's, a country cousin and her new husband, a slump on the stock market, a missing letter—connoisseurs tell me there is not a line of original Clarence Day in all this, and it seems to me that the authors might have built a better and neater story by using less than half of the new material.

However, plot is of small consequence in the stage life of the Days. The choleric but ingenuous Father (Mr. Lindsay), the gentle but pervasive Mother (Dorothy Stickney), are all that matters, and they continue to matter pretty strongly, if sometimes a little too mechanically, in *Life with Mother*. Miss Stickney and Mr. Lindsay dwarf the pallid litter of younger Days, led by John Drew Devereaux. Their stoutest support comes from Robert Emhardt and Ruth Hammond, as a hay, grain, and feed merchant and his consort from Ohio.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 21, 1948

'Life with Mother' Tops; A Rewarding Evening

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Oscar Serlin brought "Life With Mother," a sequel to the fabulous "Life With Father," to the Empire Theatre last evening. This is particularly appropriate, as the Clarence Days are a genteel family worthy to tenant such genteel premises.

In the new play, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse give us the Clarence Days again, after 22 years of felicitous married life, when the two elder sons are old enough to attend Yale and the youngest has developed into a resolute elocutionist. Father Day has by this time amassed a sufficient fortune to afford a country estate as well as a town house.

The current problem of the Days is for Father to recover an engagement ring from an old flame. Mother, it seems, has never had an engagement ring, as Father developed a hatred for diamond circlets when his initial fiancee refused to return the one he gave her.

Needless to report, Father finally appeases Mother, and Mother appeases Cousin Cora, who has lost a few dollars on a rail stock bought on Father's advice. Cousin Cora, by the way, is now married to an undiplomatic, shrewd midwestern graindealer.

Though "Life With Mother" does not appear to be quite so tightly packed with laughs as was its predecessor, it nevertheless has sufficient to provide a delightful evening. The Days are a wonderful American family, as real as Fifth Avenue and as recognizable as the members of your own household.

Their domestic problems are such as you are likely to encounter in your daily life. Father is the same irascible gentleman, and Mother, the same persuasive force that really runs the family. They are people to admire and cherish.

Howard Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney are again a marvelous Father and Mother Day. They have etched portraits that have become classics in American family comedy.

There are other excellent performances by John Drew Devereaux, Robert Wade, David Frank, Robert Antoine, Dorothy Bernard, Michael Smith, Jo Anne Paul, Gladys Hurlbut, Amy Douglass, Robert Emhardt, and Ruth Hammond.

The production is notable in that Donald Oenslager designed the setting and costumes for the first and second acts, while Stewart Chaney did the background for the third act. Guthrie McClintic has directed with affectionate feeling for the Days and their friends.

"Life With Mother" is a comedy to be recommended for the entire family. It offers an intelligent, warming and rewarding evening in the theatre. Serlin and associates have a new hit. A welcome hit. A terrific hit.

Winchell says: "Shrudlu etaoin."

"My Romance"

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 20, 1948

'My Romance' Standard Operetta With Anne Jeffreys a Lovely Lead

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"My Romance," which the Shuberts presented at the Shubert Theatre last evening, is exactly what its title hints that it might be. It is an operetta in the old style, with schmaltzy music, a tearful plot and good, loud singing. There should be a vast public for it, and it wouldn't surprise me if it goes into the standard catalog along with "The Student Prince" and "Blossom Time."

When I was 14 I was smitten by my first glamor woman, Doris Keane, in Edward Sheldon's "Romance." Last evening I got somewhat smit again by Anne Jeffreys, who has the Keane role in this musical version of the play. Miss Jeffreys is lovely, beautifully dressed in Gay Nineties gowns, and an altogether enchanting operetta heroine because she can sing and no fooling. Teamed with Lawrence Brooks, who has another fine big voice, she knocks off Sigmund Romberg's tunes as though they meant somethiqg.

Unrequited Love.

The operetta tells the same story the play told, about a minister who falls in love with an Italian opera star. She is naughty and he is pure and never the twain shall meet no matter how hot their passion. In an operetta, unfulfilled love makes audiences feel fine. Last evening's audience felt fine and wrung four encores out of Miss Jeffreys and Mr. Brooks in their "In Love With Romance" number. Don't pay any attention to me when I tell you that most of the time the show bored me stiff.

Most of the time, but not all. There is, after all, Miss Jeffreys. There also is Luella Gear, another passion of salad days, who can drop a wry, dry line like a true comedienne. There also is a nice-looking red-head named Hazel Dawn Jr. who elicits memories of her "Pink Lady" mother.

Mr. Romberg's music elicits memories of Mr. Romberg's music. It is all melodious. The jokes and the various comedy characters aren't funny, but they are not supposed to be in operetta. Watson Barratt's settings are attractive and Lou Eisele's period costumes are very nice. Rowland Leigh has adapted the play, written the lyrics and done the directing, and I'd say he has a true feeling for standard operetta.

'MY ROMANCE.'

A musical play, adapted from Edward Sheldon's "Romance," book and lyrics by Rowland Leigh; music by Sigmund Romberg; settings by Watson Barratt; costumes by Lou Eisele; dances by Fredric M. Kelly; orchestrations by Don Walker; staged by Rowland Leigh; music director, Roland Fiore; presented by the Shuberts at the Shubert Theater Tuesday evening, October 19, 1948. The cast:

Bishop Armstrong (Tom)..... Lawrence Brooks
Rosetta Armstrong..... Joan Shepard
Alice..... Marion Bradley
Harry Armstrong..... William Berrian
Miss Fotherton..... Hildegarde Halliday
Cornelius Van Tuyl..... Melville Ruick
Susan Van Tuyl..... Hazel Dawn Jr.
Percival Hawthorne-Hillary..... Tom Bate
Mrs. DeWitt..... Barbara Patton
Veronica DeWitt..... Gail Adams
Octavia Fotheringham..... Luella Gear
Sir Frederick Putman..... Sax Evans
Lady Putman..... Doris Patston
Rupert Chandler..... Melton Moore
Vladimir Luenachevitch..... Nat Burns
Miss Joyce..... Natalie Norman
Bertie Wessel..... Lawrence Weber
Georgiana Curtright..... Venne Epperly
Margaret Fears..... Mary Jane Sloan
Lawrence Riley..... Andy Apros
Perry Winslow..... Lou Madden
Dewitt Bodeen..... Donald Crocker
Rosella..... Allegra Yarron
Mrs. Marguerita Cavallini (Rita)..... Anne Jeffreys
Charlotte Armstrong..... Madeleine Holmes
Tonatti (The Organ Grinder)..... Tito Coral
First Maid..... Edith Lane
Second Maid..... Patricia Boyer
Page Boy..... Norval Torneen

Other Guests: Martha Burnett, June Helmer, Muriel Birkhead, Harold Monk and LeRoy Bush.

New York Post

OCTOBER 20, 1948

Musical 'My Romance' Is Hard on Old Play

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

They have made an operetta out of Edward Sheldon's famous old play, "Romance," and, in that one malign gesture, have managed both to destroy the legend of the work's endearing sentimental charm and to demonstrate again that the operetta can be the most tedious form of dramatic art. At the Shubert last night, there were several pretty songs in the tried and true Sigmund Romberg fashion and Anne Jeffreys looked handsome and sang attractively in the leading role, but the rest was almost epoch-making dullness.

This, I must confess, is the report of one to whom almost every operetta seems like a revival of "Blossom Time," although rarely as good. In "My Romance," as the Shuberts call their musical version of the Sheldon drama, there is a virtual compendium of the cliches of its school. The result of gathering together all of them, from the song about living for love and laughter to the series of sad partings between the lovers, is that the old romantic appeal of the ancient tear-jerker has been transformed into virtually a parody of itself.

Garbo Memories

Although my memories of the theatre reach back pretty far, I never did see Doris Keane in her famous part of Rita Cavallini, the love-lorn opera singer. But I did see Greta Garbo in a film version of the play, and she was so superbly moving and entrancingly lovely in her incomparably lyric fashion that I know there is still a lot of sentimental appeal in this now somewhat creaky drama. It is, of course, unfair to compare anyone currently in the theatre with Miss Garbo for romantic magic, but the quality shouldn't be quite as lacking as it is in "My Romance."

As I have said, Miss Jeffreys is a handsome girl, and she can sing effectively, as those who heard her in the musical "Street Scene" will attest. She is, however, too arch and metallic in her acting to capture anything of the required romantic spirit of the play. The honest, unashamedly sentimental mood of sad beauty and lost love is beyond her brisk and rather athletic playing and singing equipment, and without it the story of the unhappy affair between the opera singer and the young minister is exposed for the emotional claptrap it is.

Young Hazel Dawn

Nor is the mood helped by the playing of Lawrence Brooks as the clergyman of the romance. Like Miss Jeffreys, Mr. Brooks is a skillful singer, but, also like her, he is not well equipped for romantic acting, and he is never believable or interesting in his role. It seemed to me last night that only young Hazel Dawn Jr., daughter of the celebrated Hazel Dawn of "Pink Lady" fame, had any sense of the story's nostalgic, bittersweet quality, and, in the small role of the girl temporarily jilted by the minister, she alone succeeded in being touching.

These routine operettas must have their dim, pathetic touches of comedy, and it fell to the unhappy lot of that admirable veteran, Luella Gear, to handle most of what was fondly intended as humor. All that I can say is that she strove valiantly. The Romberg score is what can roughly be described as serviceable, but the lyrics by Rowland Leigh, who is also responsible for the adaptation, are considerably less than that. "My Romance" is so unexhilarating that it made me wonder if I hadn't been too hard on "Where's Charley?"

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 20, 1948

'Romance' Loses Charm In Musical Form

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The new musical version of Edward Sheldon's famous play, "Romance," arrived at the Shubert Theatre last evening under the auspices of the Messrs. Shubert. Titled "My Romance," it has music by Sigmund Romberg, libretto and lyrics by Rowland Leigh. For us, at least, it proved a disappointment.

It seems to us that in adapting "Romance" for the musical stage, Leigh has lost much of the charm of the original work about the young minister who fell in love with a glamorous singer with a shady past. What is left of the Sheldon play merely outlines the story and serves to cue the Romberg melodies.

The Romberg score boasts several numbers that proved popular with the first-nighters. It is a good, solid score, though certainly not among the maestro's best. It runs the gamut from patter songs to bravura operatic passages, after the manner of "Tosca."

Anne Jeffreys, whom you will remember from "Street Scene," is a beautiful prima donna. It is easy to understand why so many men fall in love with her during the evening. She has a powerful voice, and teams with Lawrence Brooks, as the minister, to do full justice to the Romberg score. In fact, Miss Jeffreys and Brooks sang with such feeling as to make the audience call them out frequently for encores.

Another featured member of the cast is delightful Hazel Dawn, Jr., whose lovely mother once thrilled America in "The Pink Lady." Tito Coral makes a brief appearance as a singing organ grinder, and wins himself a big hand with his dynamic voice.

Others in the large company meriting mention are Louella Gear, Melville Ruick, Doris Patston, Rex Evans, Joan Shepard, Nat Burns and Allegra Varron. The production is an elaborate and lavish one, with settings by Watson Barratt and costumes by Lou Eisele. The staging by Leigh is pedestrian.

The first-night audience was one of the most enthusiastic of the season. Its applause was appreciative and robust. It seemed determined to inspire the performers with salvos of palm pats.

We can only regret our failure to share such enthusiasm and enjoyment. We must honestly mark our ballot in the negative.

The Sun

OCTOBER 20, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

'My Romance' a Dull One.

The late Edward Sheldon, after coming spectacularly into the American theater with "Salvation Nell" and "The Nigger" and "The Boss," wrote an enduring drama in "Romance," which gave Doris Keane employment for a good part of a lifetime. There are some not quite doddering playgoers hereabouts who will recall the vivid playing of Miss Keane and William Courtenay.

Well, "Romance" now turns up as an operetta and under the title of "My Romance," and as such it is a musical show of almost overpowering dullness. The first performance was given last night at the Shubert.

Sigmund Romberg, a valiant contributor to the song and dance stage through all these years, has written a serviceable score—his best song is "In Love With Romance"—but the libretto of Rowland Leigh is a humdrum affair, his lyrics are no better, and the production is old-style. The romance between the Episcopal clergyman and the Italian opera singer, around which Sheldon built his play, seems entirely lifeless in the plodding operetta form.

Anne Jeffreys is now the Marguerita Cavallina who loves, and dismisses, the impetuous and adoring Tom Armstrong. Miss Jeffreys is handsome and spirited and she sings well, but she is often maddeningly kittenish. Lawrence Brooks brings a fine voice and acceptable acting ability to his playing of the clergyman. Luella Gear strives to wring some comedy from the witless book. Hazel Dawn Jr., making her first Broadway appearance, is decorative, and she could have stopped the show last night—or started it—with a bit of her mother's "Beautiful Lady." Melville Ruick makes something of a character of the suave and wealthy Cornelius Van Tuyl. Watson Barratt's settings are in the operetta tradition, as are the costumes of Lou Eisele.

One of the honorable plays of the second decade of this century now comes forth as a musical play completely lacking in class and style. "My Romance" is poky and ponderous.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 20, 1948

New Shubert Musical Fills the Prescription

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Over the years the words "Shubert musical" have come to indicate a distinct type of show, and so illustrative is the tag that it is often used to describe a work with which the Brothers S. actually have had nothing to do, except provide source material.

In the case of "My Romance," the Shuberts are the producers, the performance is in the theater bearing their name, and the show is so strictly typical that there is not a surprise in almost three hours. That ought to make the project clear. Anyone who likes this sort of thing will have a perfectly wonderful time.

Anyone who does not has only himself to blame, because he certainly ought to know what to expect.

Rather Dated Now.

You start out with a pair of star-crossed lovers who wring their hands melodically all evening, until it somehow seems a little nicer if they don't get together in the end. In this case they are a preacher and an Italian opera singer, who first loved and lost 35 years ago in Edward Sheldon's play "Romance."

Next you get a book which is frankly made up of bridges between songs. It never mentions but two subjects, one, how much Rita and Tom love each other, and, two, why they cannot marry.

Then, most important of all, you get a tuneful score, by Sigmund Romberg, as in this case, if possible. The importance of Romberg is that he always writes music for the sole purpose of singing, preferably loud and clear, and he confects melodies that nobody can help humming. He is probably the only man alive who could mate "Beautiful Lady" and "I Love You Only," call it "In Love With Romance" and have a sophisticated first-night audience yelling for a fourth encore.

A leading lady is particularly vital, and when you find one as brazenly lovely looking as Anne Jeffreys, that is a great start.

When she can pour florid finales all evening long, right at the last row of the gallery, the battle is won, even if you do wonder how her throat feels. Acting is minor, but Miss Jeffreys retains an old-school aplomb while she wrestles with a kittenish accent and some hefty melodrama.

With a rangy baritone like Lawrence Brooks you are well off because his voice sounds more virile than a tenor in the high registers, and he can sing right over the lustiest orchestration without taking abnormal breaths. He is not only a powerful singer but also an intelligent musician.

Comedy is at a premium in this sort of show, and it is well to have Luella Gear around to win big hands by making crushing insults of a few commonplace lines.

Other Ingredients.

What you need next is a pretty, fresh face, and all the better if it has a sentimentally familiar name like Hazel Dawn Jr. Then you add some tried and true characters like Rex Evans, Melville Ruick and Doris Patston just to suggest thickening the plot.

The spirit of this sort of show is reactionary, and in this day of ballets rage it will delight certain people to know that there is only one brief polka in the evening. Everybody is too busy singing.

The leading lady needs some dazzling gowns for entrances and spotlights, and if some of the other girls' fur trimming looks like sheepskin lining, remember it only makes Miss Jeffreys look more glamorous by a contrast she does not need.

I can think of no reason for it, but this kind of musical ought to be too long. Last night about 11:30 the company was happily reprising for curtain calls songs like "From Now Onward," "If Only" and "In Love With Romance." Everybody by then had long since caught on to the act and was having a perfectly fine time.

NEW YORK STAR

OCTOBER 21, 1948

By John Lardner

Romberg Without Variations

According to statistics over which I have no control, *My Romance*, the musical play that burgeoned at the Shubert Theatre Tuesday evening, is the fortieth of its kind to be made to the order of the Shubert family by the house composer, Sigmund Romberg, the poor man's Strauss.

So extensive by weight and volume is *My Romance*, and so fraught with the spirit of haven't-we-met-before, that some of the pew-holders on opening night went home from their devotions with an uneasy feeling that the clan Shubert had called in all the 39 previous Romberg shows, from the turnpikes of South Dakota, the ice-packed trails of the Yukon, and the buffalo wallows of Burma, and put them on the stage together in one big wad to celebrate the occasion.

• • •

This suspicion was unjust. The production is brand new, in the special sense of the term which means that if it ever happened before, you can't prove it. Also, in Anne Jeffreys, it has a prima donna so handsome and tuneful that she is likely to give fresh impetus, if she is not damned careful, to the manufacture of Shubert-Romberg operettas, which might be a heavy load for her lovely conscience to bear.

My Romance has a plot, bright lights, a large cast, a lot of costumes, and was caught by the clockers Tuesday in 2 hours 45 minutes net, exclusive of intermissions. It has a quantity of Romberg songs which, if laid end to end—well, wait a minute, what do I mean by *if* laid end to end? That's the way they are laid. They are familiar, reassuring songs, entitled *From Now Onward, Written in Your Hand, Love and Laughter, If Only, In Love with Romance* (which begins like *Come, Come, I Love You Only*), and *Bella Donna* (which begins like *Funiculi, Funicula* and tips its hat to *Santa Lucia* as it passes by).

• • •

The book and lyrics are by Rowland Leigh. In regard to lyrics, you know that Mr. Leigh has got the muse where he wants her when he rhymes "palmist" with "alarmist" and "deportment" with "important." In regard to the book, I noticed a curious atmosphere in the town Tuesday night, as follows:

My Romance's plot is based on a play called *Romance*, by Edward Sheldon, in which a lady named Doris Keane beguiled the proletariat in 1913. It dealt with the blighted love affair of a profane opera singer from Italy and a spiritual Protestant Episcopal clergyman from lower Fifth Avenue. It made so profound an impression on the playgoers of the time that in every waterhole I visited the other night, before and after the Shubert opening, I found strong men weeping gently into their Pabst at the memory.

• • •

"Ah, what a play that was!" said the strong men one after another.

"Well, that makes it nice for you," I replied, "because you can now lurch up to the Shubert y evening and catch it all over again."

To a man, the drinkers recoiled slightly at this remark and glanced at their watches.

"Well," they said with a furtive lick of the chops, "I am going to be awfully busy for the next six months. But I certainly got a bang out of it in 1913!"

Anyway, Miss Jeffreys is as decorative as Miss Keane was, and probably a much better singer, Romberg-Italian accent and all. Lawrence Brooks, as the clergyman in *My Romance*, looks like the late Charles Butterworth but sings with a good, clear baritone voice.

There is a special compartment of purgatory, never explored by Dante, where people are forced to play comedy roles in Shubert musicals, and in this tortured region, for unstated sins, we find Luella Gear and Nat Burns, uttering Shubert jokes. If for no other reason, you might go to *My Romance* to study their fate and mend your ways while there is still time.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 20, 1948.

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Lovers of the dramatic unities should study "My Romance," which was put on at the Shubert last evening. It is standard operetta with standard routines and situations that have not changed through the years. At one time the authors and composers may have believed in those ritualized gestures toward stock romance. But they are pure formula now with high society, passionate love that tears the vocal cords apart and sets the brasses and drums to roaring in the orchestra pit, a theme song, mobility, elegance and boredom.

* * *

It is customary to represent culture by hiring one or two good singers. In the present instance, they are Anne Jeffreys and Lawrence Brooks, who have excellent voices that are trained and beautiful and sing commonplace music with all the authority of opera. But, like troupers and professionals, they sing in an honest style, for which this playgoer is grateful. Sometimes "My Romance" sounds like something genuine.

Mr. Romberg's music is seldom as good as it sounds. An old hand at standard operetta, he runs through a whole library of formal European mannerisms. Look at the titles of his musical numbers: "Souvenir," "Millefleurs," "Aria," "Desire," "Polka," "In Love With Romance," "Finalet" "Interlude," "Prayer." As the word-and-rhyme man, Rowland Leigh presumably has something to do with the titles of these songs. But they also indicate the nature of Mr. Romberg's musical routines that are as old and usually as uninspired as standard operetta.

* * *

Mr. Romberg is also a great fellow for volume. Like Bobby Clark's singing, his composing may not be so good, but it is loud and noticeable, particularly if you sit on the side of the horns and percussion. Mr. Romberg does not waste instruments. When an orchestra plays his music, every man keeps working throughout the evening and earns his fee.

"In an industrious" mood, Rowland Leigh has knocked "My Romance" together out of the late Edward Sheldon's valiant and durable "Romance." Violating all the codes of good social conduct, a clergyman falls in love with an Italian opera singer, who is quite a trollop. Now he loves her; now he doesn't; now he does. Now she loves him; now she renounces him; now she reclaims him. They are going to be married; they are not going to be married. At 11:15 they had not made up their minds definitely one way or the other, and this courier fel: obliged to leave in the interests of progressive morning journalism. But since neither Mr. Romberg nor Mr. Leigh cares whether they marry or part, whatever conclusion they decided upon is doubtless perfunctory.

In these standard operettas the small talk among the people of wealth and high station seems to be getting more objectionably minute throughout the years. Although Luella Gerr is on hand to drop in a few poisonous remarks, the librettist has not given her anything sufficiently deadly. The cast includes Hazel Dawn Jr, who has a sweet manner though a weak voice. Melville Ruick, as a very refined gentleman; Rex Evans as Sir Frederick Putman, who is a snob, and Tom Bate, as Percival Hawthorne-Hillary, who is pretty high-toned himself.

Watson Barratt has designed some imposing interiors suitable for people of exalted station, and Lou Eisele has supplied costumes, some of which are ravishing. Standard operetta likes splendor and invariably supplies some, particularly for the most expensive singer. "My Romance" is no exception to this or any other rule. It is pretentious fiddle-faddle.

Journal American

OCTOBER 20, 1948

A Very Unhappy Play With Music, Dances

By ROBERT GARLAND

With every good excuse that I can offer, Edward Sheldon's 35 year old "Romance" comes out unhappily as a play with music.

Even if the book and lyrics by Rowland Leigh were more literate than they are, even if the songs and choruses by Sigmund Romberg were up to the maestro's standard, even if the Mme. Cavallini of Anne Jeffreys and the Rev. Mr. Armstrong of Lawrence Brooks were actually believable, last night's arrival at the Shubert would be no great shakes as entertainment.

For the warmed-over love story of an Italian prima donna and an American clergyman is not the stuff from which a play with music is happily concocted. And when the prima donna sings and talks with a dialect such as never was on land or sea, and the clergyman thinks and acts with an ideology such as never was in church or out, the business is of no delight to you, me or the other fellow who may come along tomorrow.

Last Winter, when I saw "My Romance" in Boston's Shubert Theatre, with music by Denes Agay and Philip Redowski, with Charles Fredericks as the Rev. Mr. Armstrong and without Luella Gear, Rex Evans, Doris Patston, Joan Shepard and Melton Moore as featured players, it was less unhappy than it was last night. Why, I cannot tell you. But I can tell you that, last February in New England, "Romance" with songs and dances gave promises that have not been fulfilled.

* * *

Among the Best

When, a couple of World Wars ago, "Romance" without songs and dances was acted for 180 consecutive performances at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, Doris Keane and William Courtney were entrusted with the prima donna and the clergyman who are entrusted nowadays to Miss Jeffreys and Mr. Brooks.

It was the season of "Within the Law" and "Milestones," "Fanny's First Play" and "Broadway Jones," "Peg o' My Heart" and "The Count of Luxembourg." Even the late Burns Mantle listed it among the finest.

Well, if it was, Miss Keane and Mr. Courtney must have done something with Mme. Cavallini and the Rev. Mr. Armstrong that Anne Jeffreys and Lawrence Brooks do not. For, with songs and dances added, the love story of the Italian prima donna and the American clergyman is no little of a bore. And the turn-of-the-century New Yorkers with whom the lovers are surrounded are incredible as they go about in gangs, insulting one another.

This being an age in which minority groups are constantly on the defensive, I, a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church in good standing, hereby protest that the Rev. Mr. Armstrong, rector of St. Giles' Church in the parish where "My Romance" is laid, is a prig, a prude and a parody on every such clergyman I have known or heard of.

Small wonder Mme. Marguerita Cavallini gives him the final brush off, assuming, as she does so, the noblest of motives. She, like me, just can not take him.

* * *

Imitation Accent

At the Shubert Anne Jeffreys sings the Sigmund Romberg music with harsh correctness. "Love and Laughter," "From Now Onward" and "In Love With Romance" are her outstanding numbers. These she delivers backed up by Lawrence Brooks.

"Millefleurs" "If Only," "Prayer" and an imitation Italian aria, she gives out alone. Wearing her Lou Eisele costumes with an air, Miss Jeffreys is better as a singer than as an actress. And her Italian-American dialect is no comfort to the ear.

As for Lawrence Brooks, I do not see how anybody could do anything he fails to do as the priggish, prudish parody of a clergyman. How the Rev. Mr. Armstrong ever got to be rector of St. Giles Protestant Episcopal Church, you will never know from me. And Mr. Brooks does nothing to improve upon the unlikely character the librettist originally devised. Even as the aging Bishop Armstrong, he is wiggy and unreal.

Only Tito Coral, as an organ grinder, and his unnamed monkey, manage to come through. Even such assured performers as Luella Gear, the Octavia Potheringham, and Rex Evans, the Sir Frederick Putman, sink sadly down beneath their heavy and disheartening material . . . "My Romance" should have stood in bed out on the road. There, the paying populous adored it.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 20, 1948

— By HOWARD BARNES —

Dismal Tear-Jerker

SOMETHING of a new low in gayety is set by "My Romance," an overstuffed musical which has arrived at the Shubert Theater. There is one electric moment in this Rowland Leigh adaptation of Edward Sheldon's antiquated tear jerker when the veteran Luella Gear, playing an anomalous role, remarks that her next husband will have one foot in the grave and the other in Tiffany's. It startled an overpolite audience into laughter and applause. For the rest of the time first-nighters were regaled with dreary Sigmund Romberg tunes and a dither of period posturing. Anne Jeffreys and Lawrence Brooks sing vigorously through a ponderous plot, but their solos and duets scarcely constitute an enjoyable entertainment.

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The Sheldon work, you probably won't remember, had Doris Keane in the starring role of an Italian diva when it was first presented in 1913. It has not improved with age, nor the clumsy melodic translation which it has been accorded. Leigh has settled for stilted dialogue and witless lyrics in his share of a dismal enterprise. Romberg has stuck to such familiar musical phraseology that a very ordinary tune called "In Love With Romance" has an air of distinction in comparison with its companion pieces. Since the staging of a saccharine fable about an ill-starred romance between a bishop of St. Giles Church and a supposedly glamorous soprano at the end of the last century is interminably stuttering, there is almost nothing to recommend this Shubert production.

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Miss Jeffreys attacks the part of Cavallini, a tempestuous thrush of the '90s, with more vocal than dramatic skill. Her accent wavers between Russian, Italian and Hottentot, while her amorous conquest of a dull-witted minister comes under the heading of shooting a sitting duck. At one point in the vintage proceedings, she arrives in the rectory with a monkey, sings a number known as "Belladonna" with an organ-grinder and swishes out of the establishment quite forgetting her simian pet. In another, she indulges in what purports to be a big renunciation scene, leaving the bishop to the protective adoration of a Van Tuyl. She rarely enlivens dull material.

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Brooks is no better in his characterization of the misguided man of God. He is forever waiting for a song cue and appears definitely disappointed when the piece asks him to be a doleful and stupid lover. There are a lot of assistants in "My Romance," including Melville Ruick, Hazel Dawn jr., Rex Evans, Tom Bate, Allegra Varron, Nat Burns and Miss Gear. They merely serve to crowd unimaginative settings by Watson Barratt. Exhumation was ill-advised in the latest show to clump into town. Its musical decorations merely make it look more seedy.

"The Leading Lady"

The Sun

OCTOBER 19, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Wonderful Atmosphere, Little Play.

Ruth Gordon has put her heart and her rich stage experience but not all of her playmaking sense into the writing of an affectionate, turn-of-the-century play which she calls "The Leading Lady." Staged by the extraordinarily capable Garson Kanin, it was presented at the National last evening by the managerial firm of Victor Samrock and William Fields.

"The Leading Lady" is crowded with atmosphere. You hear the hoofbeats on the quiet streets of the New York of 1900 and the hurdy-gurdy is at the window. There are many references to the great Charles Frohman, and the names of Belasco and Maxine Elliott and Nat Goodwin come into the dialogue. Clyde Fitch, with his precise speech and primly-kept mustache, is a character and there are the Marriotts, Gerald and Gay, a famous acting couple—beloved, respected, successful.

It's all told in a fine period living room by Donald Oenslager, and Mainbocher has designed fetching costumes. There are delightful scenes here and there, little touches and spurts and flashes, and there is good acting all the way. But "The Leading Lady" is a play of numerous infirmities; it never actually takes hold. The first act ends effectively after a curiously flat beginning, and for the remainder of the evening the course is downhill. All of you who have affection and reverence for the living theater will want to like "The Leading Lady" and you will like it—in spots. But its shortcomings won't go unnoticed.

Miss Gordon's story is about the decline in the fortunes of Gay Marriott after the passing of her husband and theatrical partner, and of her struggle to achieve independence. When Gerald dies she finds herself helpless. Her plays fail; her prestige dwindles. She sells her antiques, pawns her jewels, takes in lodgers. She finally gains her release from a domination that has come from the grave, but the transformation, as it is worked out in Miss Gordon's final act, is not convincing.

"The Leading Lady" brings forth some sharp performances. Miss Gordon contributes some detailed, expert acting and gives the play its best scene with her reading of a review of a Marriott opening, putting in her own interpolations to save the pride of her strutting and bombastic actor-husband. Ian Keith is excellent as the stormy and tyrannical Marriott. James MacColl plays skillfully as the fastidious and prolific Fitch, the leader of the American dramatists for a dozen years, and John Carradine is amusing as the hammy dramatic critic, an outrageously sentimental fellow, given to insult and to ornate prose.

There is some entertaining cackling from Ethel Griffies, who plays a grand old lady of the theater; some robust acting from William J. Kelly, and good performances from Ossie Davis and Harry Sheppard. The character of Belasco has been dropped since the road testing, but a girlish and lively creature named Maudie remains. If you care to forget the legends of elusiveness and inaccessibility that have come down through the years you might decide that you're gazing upon a youthful Maude Adams, now played by the pretty Margot Stevenson.

"The Leading Lady" has the true feeling of that completely fabulous invalid, the theater. It is a gallant tribute from Miss Gordon to a profession that she loves. But it is defeated by the looseness of its construction, by the lack of impact in some of the important scenes and, actually, by the weakness of its main story line.

'THE LEADING LADY.'

Play by Ruth Gordon; directed by Garson Kanin; setting and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Mainbocher; production associate, David M. Pardoll; presented by Victor Samrock and William Fields at the National Theater, Monday evening, October 18, 1948. The cast:

Maudie	Margot Stevenson
Clyde	James MacColl
Clara	Elizabeth Dewing
Annie	Margaret Barker
Lester	Harry Worth
Mr.	Sonia Sorel
Williams	Mildred Dunnock
Clarissa	Brooke Byron
Trent	Ossie Davis
Everett	Emory Richardson
Stentete	Guy Spaull
Gerald	Ian Keith
Gay	Ruth Gordon
Harry	Wesley Addy
Benjy	John Carradine
Mrs.	Laura Pierpont
Old Carter	Wm. J. Kelly
Mrs. Gilson	Ethel Griffies
Eugene	Douglas Watson
Mr. Beckwith	Harry Sheppard

SYNOPSIS: The play takes place in the home of Gerald and Gay Marriott, 60 West Twenty-seventh Street, New York City. Act I—The 26th of December, 1899. Midnight. Act II—October, 1901. Late afternoon. Act III—January, 1902. Early afternoon.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 19, 1948

'Leading Lady' Goes Back To '90s, But Not Gaily

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "The Leading Lady," which Victor Samrock and William Fields brought to the National Theatre last night, Ruth Gordon has attempted to recapture some of the gaiety, brilliance and heartbreak of the theatre at the turn of the century. Though the nostalgic play has the benefits of a handsome production and a fine cast, it never comes completely and successfully to life.

Among the personages supplying incidental background are Clyde Fitch and a critic who acts something like William Winter and writes, judging by some of his compositions read out loud on stage, as enthusiastically if not so cleverly as Alexander Woollcott.

The plot is not a new one. It is a patchwork of flashes from "Pygmalion," "The Ephesian Widow" and almost any caveman movie you can recall. It deals with a glamorous and selfish actor-manager, who has discovered talent in a hotel chambermaid, developed it and capitalized upon it via marriage.

Jealous and vain, the actor-manager turns his wife and leading lady into a Trilby, a woman obsessed by the belief that she can be triumphant only when playing opposite her Svengali. This belief persists for a couple of years after the actor-manager's corny death, a death which came to him at the height and as the result of a brutal and childish tantrum.

Finally, the actress's belief in herself is restored by adversity, frank advice from an ex-maid, the love of a flunky turned eminent playwright, and the sympathy—believe it or not—of a drama critic. Author Gordon has written a fat but unprofitable title role for star Gordon. She acts much more out of it than she wrote into it. She has been much more successful in penning parts for her associates in the cast.

The marvelous Ethel Griffies walks away with the better scenes as a salty, resourceful and venerable trouper. Mildred Dunnock, an excellent emotional actress, makes the most of an emotional assignment. William J. Kelly sparks a couple of episodes as a wise and high-spirited thespian. Ian Keith, John Carradine and Wesley Addy deserved better from Miss Gordon; they are forced to struggle valiantly and capably with roles that border on the embarrassing.

There is a lavish set by Donald Oenslager, period costumes by Mainbocker and direction by Garson Kanin.

There were great men and women, witty men and women in our theatre at the turn of the century, but, unfortunately, playwright Gordon has made them seem stodgy, dull and a little foolish in "The Leading Lady."

Journal-American

OCTOBER 19, 1948

A Brilliant Play Written, Acted by Ruth Gordon

By ROBERT GARLAND

Here, you will be glad to know, is the theatre, the real, the unquenchable, the three-dimentional theatre, brought back alive and displayed, for everyone to see, up on the stage of the National. Here is Ruth Gordon, the player, starring in "The Leading Lady," by Ruth Gordon, the playwright, each scoring brilliantly in her own capacity.

Here, no matter how you mean it, is a show. Miss Gordon, as player and playwright, has brought forth the magic make believe of which the theatre alone is capable. And Garson Kanin, her husband and director, has supplied the skill to catch that magic and, with firm yet tender understanding, transform it into the semblance of reality.

"The Leading Lady," as handsomely produced by Victor Samrock and William Fields, is by the theatre, of the theatre and for the theatregoer who respects and relishes the theatre as much as Ruth Gordon, the player and the playwright, does. Plus her fine professional fellows in yesterday's all-theatre evening on 41st st.

To my way of thinking, "The Leading Lady" is the first wholly satisfying theatrical adventure the new season has supplied. Out of her great knowledge of, her even greater affection for, the world of pay-as-you-enter make-believe, Miss Gordon has fashioned a tragic-comedy for the theatre itself to cheer and cherish.

Herewith, it is cheered, cherished and reported to be vastly to this one reporter's liking.

• • •

Quick, Colorful

The leading lady of Ruth Gordon's play, along with the leading lady of Ruth Gordon's playing, is no image on which the curious theatremonger can put a satisfying finger. Instead, Gay Marriott is an imaginary figure composed of many an unimaginary mosaic. But mostly is she a quick and colorful collage from Miss Gordon's memories.

You meet her in the drawing-room of the Marriotts, Gerald and Gay, at 60 W. 27th st., New York. It is the midnight of the 30th of December. Outside, as well as in, the century is just about to turn, with the 19th turning out and the 20th turning in. An opening-night, after-the-theatre, festivity is under way.

Everybody is on hand, from Clyde, the leading playwright, to Benjy, the leading critic. But, beneath the toasting and the chatter, all is not well in the house of Marriott. So unwell are the things unseen and, publicly, unspoken, that, before the new century gets good and started, Gerald is dead and Gay is widowed.

The rest of "The Leading Lady," the two gay, heart-breaking acts that follow, shows how Gay Marriott, alive and struggling, is, to all intents and purposes, dead and buried with her charming dastard of a husband. Fascinated, you watch her as, all bluff and bravery, she goes from bad to worse, from worse almost into Gerald Marriott's unhallowed grave.

Only the other day I knew an actress who could have been Gay Marriott. But, on the other hand, she obviously was not.

• • •

Finer Nights

At the end, Ruth Gordon, as playwright, saves Ruth Gordon, as Gay Marriott, from living death in a young ladies' finishing school outside of Washington, D. C. As joy meets girl in the piece's grand finale, there are hints of finer nights and matinees to come. For Gay Marriott, and the two Gordons, Ruth and Ruth.

The Ruth Gordon who is the playwright has written the Ruth Gordon who is the player a rigorous role that calls for flawless, over-and-under playing. This it receives in the talents of its author-actress. The unreal leading lady superimposed upon the real is tremendously effective. And Miss Gordon's finest performance up to now.

Her surrounding players are, in deed and word, excellent. Ian Keith, as Gerald Marriott, the haunting husband; Mildred Dunnock, as Williams, the maid who is a savior; John Carradine, as the critic who is a human being; Ethel Griffies, as the old actress who is a caution; William J. Kelly, as the old actor who is a triumph; Douglas Watson, as——

These, and several of the others, plus Donald Oenslager's handsome drawing-room, Mainbocker's handsome costumes and Garson Kanin's handsome direction, make of "The Leading Lady" a truly notable theatrical occasion, and of Ruth Gordon, player and playwright, the leading leading lady of 1948-1949 season.

Here, you will again be glad to know, is the real, the unquenchable, the three-dimensional theatre.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 19, 1948

'Leading Lady' Called Amiable but Aimless

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is an amiable and aimless play, "The Leading Lady," in which its author, Ruth Gordon, is starring. Taking place between 1899 and 1902, this story of an actress who lives in the shadow of her dead husband unfolds like a photo album bound in velvet and hinged with brass.

Just as such an album charms only the direct descendents of the subjects, the life of Gay Marriott has no particular fascination for outsiders. There is nothing in what the play reveals of her to corroborate those myriad talents to which the other characters so constantly refer.

Gay and Gerald are a highly successful acting team. She adores him, giving him all credit for her career and the acclaim they receive. Monstrously vain, he has bullied her into believing she is a nonentity without him. Her confidence is so undermined that when he dies she is a failure until her friends convince her that he used her callously, and that she can be just as good, if not better, without him.

No Theatrical Tinge.

Sopped in theatrical reference, the play is a case of saying things are so, instead of letting them happen. It never smells of the theater, nor does it for a moment achieve the fanatic glamour of, say, "Trelawney of the Wells."

There are references to new Shaw plays, to Mansfield and the Frohmans, and Clyde Fitch is in evidence in person. These atmospheric touches sound like careful research.

The play has a disjointed progression, with adept theatrical situations soon nulled by moody talkative stretches. There is an amusing notion that gets nowhere, in the older actors' attempt to remind the star how to laugh on the stage.

Miss Gordon Has Courage.

It is a question whether Miss Gordon does herself any service with this play, and she is clearly sporting to have brought it to town after once closing it on the road. Her role could have been played by any handsome personality, so supported is it with compliments, adoration and concern from the other characters.

Anyone as technically sure and theaterwise as Miss Gordon must find little to get her teeth into here. Play it she surely can, and does. In the face of what you know of the star, it must be the fault of the play that you believe everything about Gay Marriott except that she can act.

Gerald, who only lives till the first intermission, is, in the hands of Ian Keith, soaked with limelight. He is elegant, cruelly egotistical, and grandly unable ever to stop acting.

First-Rate Support.

The supporting cast is generally first-rate. John Carradine is a witty and flourishing critic who pulls no punches. As the adamant maid who finally lifts the leading lady out of her slough, Mildred Dunnock is tart and realistic.

Ethel Griffies has a way of making a house burst into applause at a single line, and her comedy is so exact one suspects she could have been a fine diamond cutter if she were not an actress.

Other performances, both helpful and agreeable, are given by Wesley Addy, James MacColl, Brooks Byron, William J. Kelly and Laura Pierpont.

There is a rich setting by Donald Oenslager that gets dismantled before your eyes as the Marriott fortunes dwindle.

"The Leading Lady" has a double strike against it in its very premise, when one considers the rarity with which an artist of any kind is successfully depicted on the stage, and further that this *story* concerns the most negative period in the whole life of a very active woman.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 19, 1948

'The Leading Lady' Pleasant but Choppy Charade About the Stage

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is an extra risk in writing a play about stage people—for then an audience gets a double dose of theatre, with actors acting like actors. And when an actor writes the play it becomes almost a triple dose. Fortunately, most actors are human, so when such a risky play comes off it comes off very well indeed.

I wish I could report that Ruth Gordon's "The Leading Lady," which was offered last evening at the National Theatre, has come off very well, for Miss Gordon is an adept writer for the stage and in the title role she plays adroitly, intelligently and some times movingly.

Instead, though, I feel that "The Leading Lady" comes off well only in parts. In actors' parts. Miss Gordon has generously given several well-selected players some punchy scenes of a satisfyingly theatrical nature. The venerable and adorable Ethel Griffies, for instance, takes over the stage any time she has a mind to, and can win plaudits even with such an old joke as, "How do you do?" "How do I do what?" The almost equally venerable William J. Kelly has a really touching moment when he is teaching a group how to make "uproarious laughter" on a stage.

Great Stage Stars.

But, on the stage, a play is not always the sum of its parts—for they may not add up. At "The Leading Lady" I shamefacedly found I wasn't caring very much whether the heroine clambered back to stardom or not. (I knew she would, of course, for the piece makes no pretense of being subtle.)

The story is about a great stage couple at the turn of the century. The husband is a ham and the wife is a fine actress—but the husband dominates the wife. When he dies of a stroke brought on by becoming angry at a dramatic critic, the ever-loving wife dies with him, artistically, instead of going on to finer accomplishments. The spark of play-acting is revived within her when a suitor finally persuades her to forget her worthless mate and strike out for herself.

There are some touches of realism besides Donald Oenslager's nice period setting and Mainbocher's costumes. One of the characters is Clyde Fitch. There are references to Johnny Sargent, Charles Frohman, Charles Hawtrey and David Belasco. The most characterful of characters is a dramatic critic who frequents actors' salons and brings copies of the notices he has just written. Maybe critics were like John Carradine in those fine old days—but Mr. Carradine's flamboyance makes the present passel of paid playgoers look like so many shabby mice. (Who was that who just said "And why not?").

Many Good Bits.

Ian Keith is just right as the leonine ham who is married to Miss Gordon, his leading lady. He has a big scene in which he throws a drink at her, calls her a slut and suffers a coronary occlusion. Miss Gordon's own best scene—for even her work is a succession of scenes rather than a role—is the reading of one of Mr. Carradine's notices, in which she twists the wording to give her husband a break. Mildred Dunnock gets her chance when, after being a faithful personal maid almost all evening, she cuts loose on Miss Gordon with some sound advice. Wesley Addy lends nice earnestness as the suitor.

"The Leading Lady" is actors acting actors. In her fine and delightful "Years Ago" Miss Gordon wrote a play about a girl who wanted to be an actress—herself. It was real, because Miss Gordon is real. Not even all the directing skill of Garson Kanin can make the new play more than a charade. Often a pleasant and funny one, but not very moving.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 19, 1948

Ruth Gordon Appears as 'The Leading Lady' in a Play About the Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having fallen in love with the theatre many years ago, Ruth Gordon has posted a nice, sentimental valentine to it. "The Leading Lady," she calls it; it was produced at the National last evening. When Miss Gordon became a playwright about five years ago, she virtuously renounced the stage, which requires a good deal of personal attendance. Since old admirers of her valiant and penetrating acting never took her renunciation seriously, they are entitled to look smug this morning. For the leading lady, dressed in some stunning little numbers that Mainbocher has run up into a fortune, is Miss Gordon again, giving an honest and endearing performance.

"The Leading Lady" is the rueful saga of the woman half of a man-and-wife acting team who are panicking Broadway in the last days of the century. Gerald Marriott is a cruelly-selfish society actor. Although he is fatuous and abusive his wife, Gay, adores him; and when he dies at the end of the first act, she begins to live in his memory. Without his presence to sustain her, she loses self-confidence and after two years of failure gives up the stage, which apparently has already given her up. In the last act "The Leading Lady" destroys the ghost of Gerald Marriott, and presumably you will be seeing Gay on the stage again in a glamorous role.

Basically, it should be the character study of a woman haunted by the illusion of a love that was never real. But the character of Gay is an exterior portrait in the writing. Although Gay is waited on charmingly and wittily by her friends, she never does anything of consequence, and, unlike the minor characters, seldom says anything of moment. Although the leading lady is personally admirable, she is the least interesting character in the play, which seems curiously elusive and fitfully eventful on that account.

But Miss Gordon loves the theatre, as patrons of "Years Ago" quickly understood, and the scenes with theatre people in "The Leading Lady" are warm, humorous and delightful. As Mrs. Gilson, a tart old character actress, Ethel Griffies is enormously enjoyable and crafty. She sharpens the whole play whenever she appears. In the companion role of a fine old trouper, William J. Kelly is also richly amusing. These casual scenes are played with as much genuine affection as Miss Gordon has rubbed into the writing of them.

* * *

Under Garson Kanin's direction, the production is opulent and the performance spacious. Donald Oenslager has designed a handsome period drawing room, and lighted it beautifully. And the acting has a fine theatrical flourish. As the vainglorious Gerald, Ian Keith gives a robustious performance in a gaudy role, skillfully avoiding banalities. John Carradine, as a critic with long hair and a beard, happily proves that critics are better actors than actors are, which is something not widely known.

There are capital performances in many parts—Mildred Dunnock as a patient, bustling maid; Wesley Addy, in the stock part of a suitor; James MacColl, as a Clyde called Fitch; Harry Sheppard, as a paternal auctioneer; Douglas Watson, as a youthful, tender-hearted stage manager; Brooke Byron, as an effulgent and supercilious young leading lady.

As the leading lady of the title, Miss Gordon has a more inarticulate part to play than she has had on or off the stage for some time. None of the other characters is treated so parsimoniously in the writing. But, as usual, Miss Gordon plays it like a thoroughbred, with style, skill, awareness and sincerity. It is gallant acting in a play in which the parts are more captivating than the whole. Miss Gordon's love for the theatre is glowing and occasionally moving. But "The Leading Lady" is not her most thoroughly composed valentine.

NEW YORK STAR

OCTOBER 20, 1948

By John Lardner

Nostalgia of '23 Skidoo' Days

Ruth Gordon, author and star of *The Leading Lady*, which opened at the National Monday night, would have you believe that theatrical life was a sensationally corny thing at the turn of the century, abounding in bad plays, bad jokes, stately hams, and critics with curly whiskers who wrote epigrams in longhand and carried them around in the upper righthand pockets of their tail-coats, to read at supper parties.

So far, so good. She proves all this, beyond a whimper of doubt, in her new piece. But she also insists it was wonderful; the hams were lovable, the bad plays were in a great tradition, the jokes were good enough for her. In all probability she does herself a grave injustice on the latter count, having shown herself on more than former occasion to be a lady of wit and parts. That does not alter the fact that she now chooses, of what must be called her free will until evidence of coercion is produced in court, to wallow in the bogus romance of the stage world of 1899-1902 on its own third-rate terms.

* * *

The proceedings at the National begin with mood music (*I Can't Tell Why I Love You, Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey, Lily of Lagoona*) by a string trio in a box. The curtain then rises upon a midnight party of theatrical folk, with none other than Clyde Fitch at the piano, pregnant with the notion of writing *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines*, a play which my forebears told me ranks below *Hamlet* but not as low as *Rip Van Winkle*.

For the rest of the evening, the air is filled with reverent or pally references to Will Gillette, Johnny Sargent (he painted), Ada Rehan, Ellen (Terry), Joe Jefferson, the Holland House, Charles Froham, Mario Tempest, and Delmonico's (a beanery.)

The characters on the stage point out that Herald Square is not really uptown at all any more, and titillate one another with every bon mot of the period with the notable exception of "Twenty-three skidoo."

Miss Gordon, as I mentioned more in sorrow than in anger, appears to believe that all this is excellent sentimental stuff, capable of standing on its feet with little or no help from her. Now and then she throws in a wheeze which I take to be her own, usually in the form of an exit line by a playwright or a critic or similar licensed wit. Samples:

¶ "He's a college boy."

"What a handicap!"

¶ Good night, all—and sundry."

¶ "My father was a card sharp, and my mother was the queen of spades."

In connection with the last statement, another character says, "What does *that* mean?" which seemed to me a fair question.

* * *

In the plot, Miss Gordon, a quiet and tender player always, is the actress wife of an actor husband who salvaged her early in life from the post of chamber-maid in the Palmer House, Chicago, and then regretted it, because she could act better than he could.

The husband (Ian Keith) dies at the end of the first act, poisoned by a review which rates his wife above himself. He is soon revenged, because it turns out that she cannot act at all without him, not even in a Clyde Fitch play.

In fact, she is a dead duck financially until a playwright even worse than Fitch—but fictional—comes along with a play of which she reads a few gruesome lines and recovers her inspiration and her will to work.

In extenuation of what I have said above, I will add that Miss Gordon does occasionally produce pretty sharp bits of speech of current vintage. These fall mostly to her own lot and that of a solid character actress named Ethel Griffies. The single set of *The Leading Lady*, by Donald Oenslager, is nice, and an expert tells me that the ladies in the play are handsomely gowned by Mainbocher. The star's husband, Garson Kanin, has directed the thing in a loyal sort of way.